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UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD CUBA IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

by

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UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD CUBA IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

SUMMARY

The collapse of the Soviet Union has stripped the Castro regime in Cuba of its political, economic and military underpinnings. Castro has assumed a very hard line and insists he will not abandon Communism, but in view of his mounting economic problems, many now wonder whether he can survive. The United States has a multitude of interests in Cuba ranging from vital national security concerns to lesser matters such as political/ideological conflicts, human rights, immigration, and narcotics. Three basic approaches have been suggested for U.S. policy: increase the pressure; maintain the status quo; and engage in a dialogue. A careful analysis of the situation in Cuba indicates that only by promoting the peaceful transition to a democratic successor government in Cuba can U.S. long-range interests be served. An interest-based policy would have a proactive strategy employing the full range of the instruments of statecraft to secure the political opening needed for such an outcome.

ISSUE DEFINITION

Ask an American what U.S. policy toward Cuba should be, and he is likely to respond without hesitation: "Get rid of Fidel Castro!" Given the three decades of animosity between the United States and the Castro regime, this visceral, emotional response is natural and understandable. Whether it is the right answer, however, is a crucial question that American policy makers must decide.

The question of policy toward Cuba will be one of the key foreign policy issues facing the United States in Latin America in the 1990s. It has assumed greater salience today because of the collapse of international communism. Many predict that the loss of political, economic and military support from the Soviet Union will lead inexorably to Castro's fall. Unfortunately, among the more realistic scenarios about when and how change can come in Cuba are distasteful ones that include considerable violence, even civil war, and that produce a post-Castro government that is no less authoritarian and repressive.

The central issue for American policy makers is to analyze carefully where the United States should go with regard to Cuba, and then to map out a feasible course on how to get there.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Current Situation

For 33 years, Castro ruled Cuba without serious challenge. He imposed a totalitarian state on a Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist model that provided basic social services--education, food and health care--to the population while it suppressed all opposition. He received billions of dollars of aid each year from the former Soviet Union to sustain his failed economic system as well as to provide the political and military support necessary to become a major player on the international stage.

The demise of the Soviet Union has had a profound impact on Cuba. In a few short years, Castro has been stripped of the political, ideological, military and economic underpinnings of his power.

On the economic front, the collapse of the Soviet Union could hardly have come at a worst time for Castro. His efforts to reduce his dependency on the Soviet bloc by expanding Cuba's commercial relationships with noncommunist nations was stymied in the early 1980s. Cuba's foreign exchange liquidity dried up, and in 1986 Cuba was compelled to suspend interest and principal payments on its \$6 billion debt to Western nations. Unable to trade with the West, Cuba turned again to the East, where it could barter; by the end of the decade over 85% of its trade was with the socialist nations, including 70% with the Soviet Union itself.

In addition to being Cuba's principal trading partner, the Soviet Union provided massive amounts of economic assistance through various mechanisms such as buying Cuban sugar at artificially high prices and providing Cuba cheap oil which it could then resell abroad for hard currency. While the full extent of this aid is disputed, estimates run from \$2-3 billion per year to more than \$4 billion per year. (Soviet military aid was estimated at about \$1 billion per year.)

The reform movement in the Soviet Union led by Mikhail Gorbachev led to a major schism with Cuba. Castro flatly rejected perestroika and glasnost. Rather than moving to liberalize Cuba, in 1986 he launched a "rectification" program that reversed modest free-market reforms allowed earlier in the decade and imposed planning based on ideology. He also took steps to diversify his economy, including such actions as authorizing joint ventures in tourism in 1987.

By 1990, the political changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were taking their toll on the Cuban economy. Markets in the liberated nations of Eastern Europe were drying

up. The Soviet Union, which supplied 90% of Cuba's energy needs, cut deliveries by 20%. In July, Gorbachev decreed that starting in 1991, the Soviet Union would switch trade with Cuba from barter to hard currency. As the economic situation became increasingly grim, Castro announced a nationwide austerity plan, the "Special Period in Peacetime," that included strict rationing of basic goods and electricity.

The political and economic relationship between the Soviet Union and Cuba continued to wither in 1991. Petroleum and other products arrived late and often in reduced quantities, with serious consequences; delayed shipments of wheat, for example, resulted in sudden shortages and unprecedented price rises.

Hopes for a turnaround in Moscow were dashed by the abortive coup attempt in August. While Cuba did not declare its position, there was little doubt that Cuban officialdom supported the coup and was horrified by its failure. The forces that led the coup and that had been discredited and decapitated--the leadership of the Communist Party, the military hierarchy and the KGB--were precisely those institutions that had supported and sustained the Cuban revolution. Cuba's first, terse statement on the coup--five days after it had collapsed--warned of the consequences for the island; it was an omen of the dark days to come.

During a visit to Moscow by Secretary of State James Baker barely two weeks later, Gorbachev announced that Soviet Union intended to withdraw its military forces from Cuba and would soon open talks with the Castro government about pulling out its training brigade. Gorbachev further announced that his government intended

"to transfer our relation with Cuba to...mutually beneficial trade and economic ties, and we will remove elements from that relationship that were from a different time and a different era."¹

The Cubans angrily responded with a sharply-worded statement complaining that this announcement had been made without prior consultation and "constitutes inappropriate behavior...."²

With the fall of Gorbachev and the Soviet Union and the rise of Russian President Boris Yeltsin and the Commonwealth of Independent States, relations with Cuba have become even more strained. Yeltsin strongly opposes aid to Cuba, and economic turmoil in the CIS has significantly diminished trade. In Cuba, Castro braced his people for "The Zero Option," a possible total cut-off of Soviet petroleum, food, and other supplies.

The cumulative effects of these developments on Cuba's economy have been severe. Its Gross Domestic Product plummeted 15% in 1990 and another 20% in 1991. Factories have closed, and

people in cities are being sent to the countryside to help grow crops. In the fields, draft animals have replaced tractors. Transportation has deteriorated, and cars and buses have been replaced with Chinese bicycles. As one journalist noted: "...the plain fact is that life for virtually everyone in Cuba is getting worse and harder at an astonishing rate."³

In addition to its economic consequences, the collapse of the Soviet Union has important political and ideological implications for Castro. In the new world order, Castro no longer has the support of one of two superpowers; he is on his own. With communism totally discredited, his claim of being on the winning side of history rings more hollow than ever.

In October 1991, Castro convened a congress of the Cuban Communist Party, for only the fourth time in 30 years. There was some hope that the congress would produce major new initiatives to address Cuba's growing difficulties, but only minor measures emerged. Castro ruled out any political opening or economic liberalization; he declared to the congress that he was prepared to have Cuba carry on alone if necessary as the sole defender of Marxism-Leninism.

Despite the steady deterioration in Cuba, Castro has rejected serious change, "and for good reason [from his vantage point], given how his fellow Communists in Eastern Europe came tumbling down as soon as they cracked open the door to reform."⁴ Castro now finds himself facing the most serious challenge of his regime. As one writer noted: "Castro's conundrum is that while nothing less than a radical overhaul of the nation's economy can revive its free fall, renunciation of state-run economics could open a Pandora's Box of unpredictable events..." that threaten his power.⁵

This increasingly difficult situation has lead to much speculation about whether Castro can maintain himself in power and for how long. Many conclude that he will not, and they ask whether he will leave peacefully or in a hail of bullets. One biographer of his wrote:

"Fidel Castro is not a man likely to go quietly into the night, to fade away, or to move into forgotten exile somewhere; that is not his style, and his combatative psychology would not permit that.... he will almost certainly choose to go down in an apocalyptic end."⁶

Another expert on Cuba similarly predicted that Castro would not go easily and that, in the end, the society would be deeply polarized and the armed forces would be divided, with the result "an appalling bloodbath."⁷

This is the situation confronting U.S. policy makers today, a situation vastly different than that which has existed for the past 30 years.

U.S. Interests in Cuba

A crucial step in formulating a sound policy is to examine carefully U.S. interests in Cuba. While "getting rid of Castro" certainly has appeal, a deeper analysis of U.S. interests reveals a multiplicity of issues ranging from vital national security concerns to lesser matters such as political/ideological conflicts, human rights, immigration, and narcotics, among others.

National Security. At the highest level comes vital national security concerns and any threat posed by Cuba to America's survival. For three decades, this threat was perceived as very serious owing to Cuba's close alliance with the Soviet Union. Cuba served as the Soviets' outpost in the Western Hemisphere, and although it presumably would not be the base for Soviet missiles (as a result of the 1962 missile crisis), it provided a wide variety of other services. At Lourdes near Havana, for example, the Soviets built their largest signal intelligence (SIGINT) facility ever constructed outside the Soviet Union itself. This state-of-the-art site monitors U.S. naval and military maneuvers in the United States as well as American military, space and domestic communications. Cuban airbases serviced Soviet reconnaissance aircraft which patrolled off the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Cuban posts similarly received Soviet surface ships and submarines. Cuban forces, particularly aircraft supplied by the Soviets, posed a significant threat to shipping in the key sea lanes to the Gulf of Mexico and the Panama Canal. While in the event of a major war American forces could defeat quickly the threat from Cuba, this would have required a major diversion of assets away from the main theater in the crucial early stages of the conflict.

The perception of a strategic threat to U.S. national security which underlaid U.S. policy for three decades is no longer operative. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the rise in Russia of a new government committed to democratic reform and cooperation with the West, the danger has clearly receded. Moreover, as noted above, the nature of Cuba's relationship with Russia is fundamentally different than that it enjoyed for three decades with the Soviet Union. Despite the tensions between Cuba and Russia, relations are not totally severed. For many conservatives in the Russian military, Cuba is an emotional issue, and they adamantly oppose abandoning it completely. Thus, in response to Cuba's protest of the withdrawal of military troops, the Russians delayed that process. They are similarly maintaining the SIGINT site at Lourdes, which as noted above is an invaluable source of intelligence on the

United States. Nevertheless, even though some remnants of the old Soviet presence remain, they exist in a much different context and are not seen as seriously threatening U.S. security.

Political Values/Ideology. Since he declared himself a Marxist-Leninist in the early 1960s and imposed the communist system upon Cuba, Castro has been a fierce ideological adversary of the United States. Over the years he actively supported numerous revolutionary movements in Latin America, and he dispatched tens of thousands of troops to Africa to prop up leftist regimes. At the height of his prestige a decade ago, Castro was elected to the head of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Where Castro once posed a considerable ideological challenge to American values, today his international influence has waned. Castro is widely seen as ossified dictator, a relic of the past. At the First Ibero-American Summit in Guadalajara, Mexico, in July 1991, Castro stood out as the sole dictator in the company of civilian, democratically-elected presidents. Castro no longer looks at Latin America as a region of potential Marxist-Leninist revolution; he now seeks to build political and economic relations, hoping that they can fill in part the void left by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The conflicts in Nicaragua and El Salvador have been resolved, and Castro's friends did not win. In South America, the most potent Marxist revolutionary movement, Peru's Sendero Luminoso, is an ideological rival of the Cuban revolution. In Africa, Cuba's military interventionist role is now history; in mid-1991, the last Cubans troops left Angola in compliance with a U.S.-brokered agreement. Today, the political and economic failures of Castro's system are obvious to all, and no one looks to Castro as leader or seeks to emulate his example. Castro does attempt to bolster his image by championing Third World causes such as the debt issue and he continues to harangue U.S. imperialism, but as the rest of the hemisphere move toward democracy and free markets, his standing is falling.

With Castro no longer a major player on the international stage, the ideological and political differences with the United States narrow to issues of domestic polices. Here, Castro's maintenance of a totalitarian, one-party dictatorship is antithetical to America's core democratic values.

Human Rights. Castro's flagrant and systemic violation of basic human rights--arbitrary arrest, ruthless repression of dissent, tight censorship, etc.--similarly place him at odds with fundamental American principles.

Immigration. In the years following the Cuban Revolution, nearly 10% of the population, or roughly 1 million persons, fled into exile. The majority of these settled in the United States, and today approximately 700,000 live in southern Florida. The latest wave occurred in the Mariel boatlift of 1980, when 129,000 Cubans

flooded into Florida. Many of these Cubans have gone on to become very productive members of the communities in which they live, but large-scale immigration nevertheless poses serious difficulties for the region. Castro uses emigration to rid himself of troublemakers--a sort of escape valve--and holds it as a potential weapon with which to harass the United States.

In the wake of the Mariel boatlift, the United States and Cuba negotiated agreement in 1984 to control immigration. Under the agreement, over 18,000 Cubans immigrants, refugees, and parolees have been admitted into the United States. Tens of thousands of other Cuban have obtain non-immigrant visas to visit the United States, and many of them then remained illegally. As the economic crisis in Cuba deepened, Castro has made it easier to leave the island by dropping in stages the age limit from 65 for men and 60 for women to 20. (One effect of this was to create such a backlog in the U.S. Interest Section in Havana that it was forced to temporarily suspend receiving new visa applications.) At the same time, the number of persons attempting to escape Cuba by crossing the Florida Straits in makeshift rafts is growing rapidly. In the first half of 1991, some 1,400 successfully made the journey, most after they were rescued by U.S. vessels. This is more than three times the total for all 1990.

The importance of the immigration issue was underscored by the testimony of a State Department official before congress in June 1991, when he stated: "A Mariel-style boatlift would be a deliberate assault by Castro on the sovereignty of the United States. We will not permit this to happen."⁸ The official went on to say that the United States had contingency plans to deal with such a situation. Nevertheless, some officials reportedly predict "a tidal wave of new refugees fleeing across the Florida Straits as the economy nose-dives and if a violent revolution is set in motion."⁹ It is difficult to imagine how the United States could cope, either operationally and politically, with such a situation. (The current controversy concerning Haitian boat people is instructive of the difficulties associated with this problem.)

Narcotics. Situated between the narcotics-producing countries of South America and the United States, Cuba is a logical conduit for illegal drugs. The United States Government has repeatedly charged that Cuba has cooperated with drug traffickers. While the Cuban Government has denied the allegations, the trial of General Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez in 1989 indicated that there was at least some involvement of Cuban officials (even if, as the Castro regime declared, it was unauthorized and illegal). It is understandably difficult to determine the extent of the drug connection and the degree to which it might be sanctioned by Castro and other Cuban officials. Moreover, so long as the current level of tension is sustained between the United States

and Cuba, meaningful cooperation on the war on drugs is greatly inhibited.

As Cuba's economic woes mount in coming months and years, there will be ever greater temptation for the government and for individuals to resort to drug trafficking to obtain desperately needed cash. Under many scenarios for the transition from the Castro era, there would be a political power vacuum that would be highly conducive to the expanded use of Cuba as a transshipment point for drugs.

Environment. Protecting the environment is global concern. Since Cuba is an island, and particularly since its economy is retreating into the 19th century, ecological issues generally are not a burning issue. There is one particular area that does merit attention, however: the construction of two nuclear reactors at Cienfuegos. Fortunately, the Soviet VVER-440 reactors are of a much safer design than those at Chernobyl, and Cuba has put them under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. Therefore, they should not pose a proliferation risk. Given the potential catastrophe a Chernobyl-scale accident could produce, however, spreading deadly nuclear radiation over wide areas of Cuba and other islands of the Caribbean and possibly to Florida, constant monitoring is needed. In addition, should the political situation in Cuba deteriorate, the prospects for some sort of nuclear incident may well increase.

Other interests. By virtue of geography, there are numerous other issues ranging from air traffic control to search and rescue in which the United States must interact with Cuba. While these are clearly of a lower order than those listed above, they cannot be ignored. Whereas before Castro came to power the United States had significant economic interests in Cuba, today it has essentially none.

Conventional Approaches

U.S. policy should seek the proper balance among all these disparate and sometimes conflicting interests. When the issues are clearly defined, it becomes apparent that a policy fixated merely on getting rid of Castro, as appealing as that thought is to many Americans, does not necessarily satisfy the full range of U.S. interests in Cuba. Following are descriptions of current U.S. policy and the basic options that have been put forward.

Current Policy

For many years, three basic issues have concerned the United States and inhibited any significant improvement in relations:

- Widespread and continuing human rights abuses within Cuba.

-- Cuba's material support for insurgency and terrorism, especially in this hemisphere.

-- Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union, which gave the Soviets advantages vis-a-vis the United States.

In a major policy statement on May 20, 1991, President Bush indicated that he would welcome changes in the U.S.-Cuban relationship. He stated:

"If Cuba holds fully free and fair elections under international supervision, respects human rights, and stops subverting its neighbors, we can expect relations between our two countries to improve significantly."

In this redefinition of policy, the earlier concern about the Soviet connection was omitted, while a specific call for internationally supervised elections was added.

The most important elements of the policy have been:

-- The absence of normal diplomatic relations. The United States believes that Cuban behavior precludes treating the regime as a responsible member of the international community. (Interest sections were established in 1977 to provide an effective and authoritative line of communications, but these do not constitute maintaining relations.)

-- Diplomatic isolation. The United States has sought to deny, to the extent possible, acceptance of Cuba as a normal member of the international community because the Cuban government pursues policies inimical to the United States and the world community.

-- Economic embargo. The United States has sought to deny to Cuba the benefits of a normal economic relationship.

Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Bernard W. Aronson has stated that the United States poses no military threat to Cuba, has no aggressive intentions toward Cuba, and has no desire to order Cuba's internal affairs. He has stressed: "The United States has no interest in seeing violent change in Cuba."

Policy Options

Three basic policies options have been prescribed by various parties:¹⁰

-- Squeeze. This course involves stepping up U.S. pressure on Castro's regime. Basically it argues that Castro is teetering on the edge and now is the time to push him over. It would take the form of tightening the embargo by prohibiting trade with Cuba by

subsidiaries of American firms (which has been permitted since 1975). Other actions would include denying U.S. economic and military aid to countries that provide aid to Cuba or buy Cuban sugar. The United States would intensify its international campaign against Cuba, such as its denunciations of Cuban human rights violations at the United Nations. This option is popular with conservatives, particularly those in the Cuban American community, and with many members of Congress of both parties. Opponents of this policy argue that it is unlikely to hasten Castro's fall and would result in Castro further restricting political space, thereby retarding political evolution. This school further warns that such actions would allow Castro to whip up Cuban nationalism and credibly blame the United States for the failures of his regime. The Bush Administration has resisted this approach on the grounds that it would unnecessarily create a conflict with other important goals in the hemisphere and in Europe.¹¹

-- Neglect. This option essentially would continue the status quo. The United States would maintain current political, diplomatic, and economic pressure, but not dramatically increase it. Although this course might not accelerate Castro's fall, it assumes that the demise of the Soviet Union will exert "intolerable pressure on the Cuban political system."¹² This option would not help enlarge the political space for dissidents in Cuba, but neither would it trigger greater repression. It would allow for discussions with the Cuban government and cooperation on bilateral issues of interest to the United States. This is the preferred option of the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy.

-- Communication. This option would entail greater contact between Cuba and the United States and lowering the pitch of U.S. rhetoric against Cuba. Various advocates propose different levels and mixtures of people-to-people non-official contact and some form of official dialogue. Some propose lifting the embargo immediately, while others suggest moving more gradually in that direction. Proponents, who include some human rights advocates in Cuba and some U.S. specialists on Cuba, argue that it would produce greater political space inside Cuba and thus foster democratic development. Proponents would generally either 1) have a more sympathetic view of the Castro regime and therefore prefer that the U.S. normalize relations or 2) believe that it is not going to fall soon and therefore it would be more pragmatic to deal with Cuba directly to address specific U.S. concerns while awaiting change. Conservatives insist that any "softening" of policy at this point would merely serve to rescue Castro and prolong his regime.

Evaluation of options and underlying assumptions

To properly evaluate these options and to determine which

leads to a more coherent policy that will advance U.S. interests, it is vital to examine carefully some of the underlying premises about the situation in Cuba.

-- Assumption 1: Economic deterioration will destabilize the Castro regime.

By any standards, it is clear that the living conditions in Cuba are declining rapidly. What is much less clear is what this means to the regime's political stability. There are linkages between politics and economics, but it would be unsound to assume that economic decline automatically produces revolt. There is no absolute level of economic activity which sparks revolution. Despite the deterioration, Cuba still ranks above many Latin American nations.

Castro will certainly do all in his power to minimize the political impact of the economic situation. Castro's abilities should not be underestimated, and he has often displayed his ability to turn adversity into advantage. He has mastered the art of distributing scarcity equitably. He will maintain as best he can social services such as medicine and education which are popular and upon which the people rely heavily. Castro will appeal to Cuban nationalism, and to the extent he succeeds in convincing the people that they are making sacrifices to defend their nation against a foreign aggressor (yankee imperialism), he will succeed in minimizing internal political opposition. (We Americans would be willing to make great sacrifices to defend our homeland. Would not the Cuban people be equally as patriotic?)

It would be unwise to make simplistic comparisons with what happened in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe with Cuba. It took 70 years and several generations for the Communist revolution in the Soviet Union to collapse. The Communist regimes of Eastern Europe were installed by Soviet military power and collapsed when that power was withdrawn. Castro has personal prestige and legitimacy as the leader of an authentic national revolution. Despite the Communist trappings, he is above all a charismatic caudillo in the traditional Latin American model.

Another factor is Castro's effective security apparatus. In addition to the large military and Interior Ministry forces, Castro has hundreds of thousands of persons in the Communist Party and purportedly millions in the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (block committees) to guard against dissent. In part because of this security apparatus, there is no significant organized opposition.

-- Assumption 2: Cuba is isolated internationally, and this will serve to weaken Castro's regime.

Castro clearly has lost much of the stature he enjoyed in

the halcyon days of the late 1970's when he headed the Non-Aligned Movement and was a major player on the international stage. He no longer has the support of Eastern Europe, and any support from Russia would be minimal.

In a new Latin America that has made great strides toward democracy and free market economies and away from authoritarianism and statist economies, he is seen less with awe and fear and more as an anachronism. The new generation of Latin leaders genuinely would like to see Cuba progress politically. They have more complex views and interests that need to be understood, however.

At the Guadalajara summit, a number of democratically elected presidents urged Castro to allow an opening in Cuba. They carefully couched their message, however, to avoid putting Castro publicly on the spot. In part, they acted out of a spirit of Latin American solidarity. Related to this was their desire to demonstrate their independence (from the United States), or, as the Mexicans described it, their "diplomatic diversity."¹³ For some, there were domestic considerations as well, and presidents opted to be soft on Castro in order to assuage the political left at home.

While there was some mild pressure on Castro by his colleagues at the summit, there were also clear signs of interest in reincorporating Cuba fully into the inter-American family, not the least of which was the fact that he was invited to participate in it. Chile and Colombia used the occasion to reestablish relations. (This left Uruguay as the only hold out among the Latin nations.) United Nations Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar and Organization of American States Secretary General Joao Clemente Baena Soares reportedly remarked that it was time for Cuba to reenter the OAS.

A similar pattern occurred in October, when Castro met in Cozumel, Mexico, with the presidents of Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela. The three presidents urged Castro to reform his Communist government and they offered to mediate his differences with the United States. At the same time, they agreed "to fight for the rapid and total reintegration of the Cuban nation into the Latin American family and for a real continental coexistence...."¹⁴ Explaining the motivation of the group, the Colombian foreign minister explained that "the last thing we would like to see is a bloodbath in Cuba."¹⁵

In sum, Castro may be out of step with Latin America, but he maintains relations with nearly all the nation's in the region, and he has relations with over 100 other nations as well. While most current Latin leaders would like to see Cuba undergo a true political opening, there is little support for U.S. policy of isolation and pressure.

-- Assumption 3. Once Castro leaves power, Cuba will become democratic.

One assumption common to all the strategies is that Castro himself is the sole obstacle to democracy in Cuba and that once he is gone, democracy will flourish. They give very little attention is given to realistic scenarios for the transition.

Three basic scenarios are possible: survival of the present regime; evolutionary adjustment of the political system without an abrupt change of leadership; and either violent or peaceful overthrow.¹⁶ Fleshing out these scenarios illustrates clearly that democracy is not the only possible outcome in Cuba.

One scenario is Castro's sudden demise or incapacitation by natural causes or accident. Presumably, his brother Raul, Minister of Defense, would step in to take his place. Raul has neither the ability nor the following of Fidel, however, and competing elements in the military, the government, and the Cuban Communist Party would quickly begin jockeying for position and influence. Cleavages already exist along ideological lines and generational lines--specifically the older leaders that fought with Castro in the Sierra Maestra in the 1950s versus younger leaders that came of age after the revolution--although these differences are kept in check by Fidel's overpowering presence. Once this inhibiting factor is removed, however, competition for power is almost inevitable. This competition may be peaceful or it may be violent. It may be resolved quickly or it might be prolonged for years. It might produce a democratic state, or it might produce a new authoritarian regime.

Other scenarios for Castro's equally plausible. Castro could be assassinated, either as an isolated act or as part of a larger coup attempt. In the former case, the aftermath would be somewhat similar to that of his death by natural causes, although the prospects for violence would likely be enhanced because of the emotions such an act would arouse. In the latter case, some faction within the military/government/party would be prepared to move to seize power immediately. There would be a good chance that their action would trigger a violent response by those loyal to Castro, and a bloody civil war could erupt. A civil war could also erupt if discontent becomes so intense that uprisings occur and at some point elements of the military and security forces rebel rather than fire on their own people. (A situation degenerating into civil war could, of course, be the impetus for a coup.) As with the first scenario, whether the eventual winners of a coup or a civil war--whoever they might be--would move toward democracy is questionable.

The only institutions in Cuba with any power to depose Castro are the military, the government bureaucracy, and the party. Of these, the military is clearly in the strongest

position. The military is "pampered and privileged,"¹⁷ however, and its members have a vested interest in preserving the system. If elements in the military are to someday move, they first would have to be reasonably certain that Castro's removal will not mean their own.

At the present time, the military is seen to be totally loyal, although the Ochoa affair suggested deep divisions might exist. There is no evidence that there is a faction oriented toward democracy and free market economics lying below the surface waiting for an opportunity to bring a political opening and capitalism to Cuba. The members of the military and the other two institutions have for over thirty years supported an anti-democratic totalitarian regime, and during a time of transition they might well choose to follow the path they know the best.

Among the possible outcomes would be the emergence of some new caudillo, who, although he might lack Castro's moral authority as the leader of the revolution, could command a sufficiently large following and be shrewd enough to hold on to power. Alternatively, some "committee" type leadership might emerge. It is possible that they would accept some degree of political opening and economic liberalism in order to obtain foreign economic assistance, but the degree of any such action is uncertain. In short, it is not reasonable to expect that the leaders of a post-Castro Cuba will automatically move toward democracy.

A key ingredient missing in Cuba to move that nation toward democracy is the lack of independent institutions, a network of groups that hold together a civil society. Other than those which operate as tools of the state, there are no political parties, no labor unions, no associations of farmers, ranchers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, etc. It is this web of institutions that provides the underpinning for a democratic political system. In Cuba today, there are no institutions to play the role that Solidarity played in Poland or that the reformist faction of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. Absent such institutions, the prospects for democracy succeeding in Cuba are bleak.

Other assumptions are contained in the specific options which are hard to either prove or disprove. For example, equally plausible arguments can be made for the assumption that putting pressure on Castro will hasten his downfall as for the assumption that it will extend his regime by providing him an excuse for his failures and repression. The fact is that no one can predict with absolute certainty what outcome any of the options will produce, since the variables are so numerous and unknowable. In any scenario, there are actions Castro could take that would help him maintain his power, and there are errors he could make that

could speed his fall. The one thing that does appear certain, however, is that if there is no political development inside Cuba to allow for the evolution of democratic institutions, when Castro does go by whatever means, there will not be in Cuba the foundation for a democratic society.

Of the various options, the "squeeze" approach focuses solely on getting rid of Castro and does little to address other interests. Further, it does nothing to help develop democratic institutions in Cuba or to facilitate a peaceful transition to a new democratic order. If the assumption is correct that it will expedite Castro's departure, it appears likely to lead to a violent transition in which the democratic orientation of the successor regime would be very much in doubt. A further problem with this approach is that it would be virtually impossible to sell internationally. In recent years, two of the critical concerns we have traditionally had with Cuba--the Soviet linkage and support for subversion--have been resolved. Adopting a policy that increases pressure at a time when Castro is seen as taking concrete steps to address our grievances will be regarded by many as simple petulance.

The "neglect" option essentially is a wait-and-hope-for-the-best approach that does little to influence events inside Cuba, although it does allow for some actions to address the less important interests.

The "communicate" option does promote a political opening in Cuba which is vital to the development of democratic institutions, and it allows some less important interests to be addressed as well. While one of its key assumptions is that taking pressure off will lead to a political opening, there is the clear danger that it will also be exploited to allow the Castro regime to muddle through.

A New Approach

Objectives

These many considerations make it possible to refine the objectives and make clearer what we should seek to achieve. The goal must be to facilitate peaceful transition to democratic government. The focus must be on a positive objective--democracy--and not on a negative one--getting rid of Castro. In practice, the two may be inseparable, as democratization may lead inevitably to Castro's fall. But this distinction is crucial to mapping out a winning strategy. Success in the former will result in a democratic Cuba, and in doing so fully address U.S. interests. Success in the latter could prove to be a Pyrrhic victory that leaves many of our interests unaddressed and leads to further problems in the future. The policy must not be centered simply on removing Castro, but in promoting the full

range of interests in the interim and on ensuring to the maximum extent possible that a democratic government will follow.

Resources Available

The United States has at its disposal a multitude of resources available to implement the policy, many of which are political and diplomatic and can be done at little cost. It also enjoys the advantage of an asymmetrical relationship in dealing with Cuba. Simply put, the United States is far more important to Cuba than Cuba is to the United States. In implementing its policy, it has far more cards to play,

One of the most visible tools is the embargo. It has economic, political and psychological dimensions and each needs to be carefully considered.

When the embargo was imposed thirty years ago, clearly there was hope it would bring Castro down. Thanks in large part to Soviet assistance to Cuba, this did not happen. Over the past three decades, Cuba has made its economy essentially independent of the United States. It sells its exports to other markets, and buys nearly all its imports from other suppliers. Those few products it needs that are only available from the United States, it obtains by circumventing the embargo.

While many argue that lifting the embargo would yield an economic boon to Castro, the facts indicate otherwise. First, Cuba has little it can sell to the United States. Its main export crop is sugar. The world is awash in cheap sugar, and the United States, in order to protect domestic producers, utilizes a strict quota system to regulate sugar imports. Even if the embargo was lifted, the quota system would prohibit the trade of Cuban sugar. Only if some other countries' shares were reduced, such as that of the neighboring Dominican Republic, could Cuba obtain a share of the U.S. market. Cuba does produce some products that could be sold in the United States, such as cigars, citrus fruits, and nickel, but the earnings would not be large.

One area where Cuba could generate foreign exchange is tourism. Here, Cuba's own infrastructure problems would be a limiting factor. Cuba has only 13,000 hotel rooms, and while it is seeking to develop its tourism industry--including by such capitalist measures as entering in joint ventures with Spanish firms--its goal for new rooms is only 5,000 per year. Cuba must provide a satisfactory level of support--quality food, water, electricity, personnel--to draw tourists, and given its meager resources, this will prove difficult. Tourism will generate some foreign exchange, but it will not provide a windfall, particularly in the early years.

Visits by Cuban Americans, who would return to see relatives

and friends and thus be in a different category than regular tourists, and would provide another source of income. Also, as restrictions on the amount of funds that could be carried to or transmitted to Cuba were lifted, remittances by Cuban Americans would grow considerable.

While Cuba could not sell much to the United States, it could not buy much from the United States either, as it has no money to pay. Cuba's credit rating is virtually zero. Cuba already obtains virtually everything it can afford to buy from other sources, and allowing it access to U.S. suppliers would be of minor consequence.

In economic terms, lifting the embargo would offer only modest benefits to Cuba, and it certainly would not produce a influx of funds that would counterbalance the loss of Soviet support. The continuing economic crisis in Nicaragua, where the United States lifted its embargo following the Sandinistas' defeat in the 1990 election, is instructive about how modest the economic impact of ending the embargo would actually be.

The embargo has important political and psychological dimensions. It is essentially a political statement of hostility toward Cuba. It serves to keep the pressure on Cuba, but it also serves as a ready excuse for the Castro regime's failure. It lends credibility to Castro's assertions that the United States is threatening. On the issue of the embargo, the United States is isolated, and our friends in Latin America and Europe would welcome our lifting it. At the same time, lifting the embargo unilaterally would dishearten opponents of Castro--in and out of Cuba--who would perceive it as a weakening of U.S. resolve.

The embargo is not the only economic tool at the disposal of the United States. For example, it can and frequently does use its influence to thwart commercial and financial transactions between Cuba and entities in third countries. It denies Cuba access to important programs such as the Generalized System of Preferences and the Caribbean Basin Initiative, and it does not allocate to Cuba a portion of the sugar quota. Similarly, it has the power in international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank to obstruct assistance to Cuba.

Beyond economic matters, the United States has a broad range of other resources. It has great clout with which to aggressively confront Cuba in international fora, such as its recent campaign to denounce the Castro regime's human rights violations. It operates Radio Marti and TV Marti to get information to the Cuban people and thereby circumvent Castro's monopoly on information on the island. It opposes Cuba's reentry into the OAS. It denies recognizing the legitimacy of Castro regime by not maintaining diplomatic relations, and it imposes

restrictions on Cuban officials visiting the United States. It holds the naval base at Guantanamo in perpetuity.

In short, the United States has a multitude of instruments ranging from coercive diplomacy to economic assistance which it can use as carrots and sticks in dealing with Cuba.

Recommendations

Strategy

The United States should use all the tools of statecraft at its disposal to facilitate a peaceful transition to a democratic government in Cuba. Borrowing from the strategy successfully employed by former Costa Rican President Oscar Arias in dealing with the Sandinistas, the United States should take risks to crack open the door in Cuba and begin a democratization process. It should entangle Castro in the process so that, once begun, it is not possible for him to reverse the process. It should be flexible and take confidence-building steps; each action by Castro to allow a political opening would be met by corresponding movement. It should act in close conjunction with friends and allies and seek their cooperation. It should make clear to Cuba and the world that its goal is democracy; it is prepared to accept Castro if he is freely elected. It should give assurances that it does not pose a military threat to Cuba; its only challenge is that of its ideas.

Following are specific steps to implement the strategy.

1. Consult with governments in Europe (including specifically Russia) and Latin America as well as Japan and solicit their support for democratization in Cuba. Engage influential Latin leaders such as the president of Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia and Argentina and seek their active, personal commitment. Gain their confidence that the United States is sincere in its desire to improve relations with Cuba in conjunction with a democratization process. Many will be sympathetic to this endeavor and willing to cooperate fully so long as they believe the United States is serious and they can deliver significant actions by the United States to ratchet down the tension. (Some would even welcome an opportunity to be involved in resolving what has been an intractable dilemma for over three decades.) This would be quiet diplomacy. The role of the United States would be played down, and Latin America luminaries would take the lead publicly.
2. After thorough consultations as outlined above, the United States should engage the Cuban government.

Procedure: This dialogue could be done directly, in a face-to-face dialogue, or through intermediaries. Direct talks offer the

advantages of ensuring that its positions are delivered correctly and minimizing misunderstandings. In this case, there would be greater advantage in accepting the offer of good offices of Latin American leaders. As the United States has far greater bargaining chips, its negotiating position can be very reasonable and even generous. By having the Latin Americans present, it would add pressure on Castro to bargain in good faith, lest he be seen by his fellow Latins as unreasonable and intransigent. The involvement of Latin leaders could also be used to deemphasize the bilateral aspect of the talks, i.e., the United States versus Cuba, and give it the flavor of a hemispheric effort to bring democracy to Cuba.

Substance: In the dialogue, the asymmetrical nature of the relationship gives the United States a great advantage, allowing it to be flexible and take steps that easily match or surpass those by Cuba. The guiding principle should be that every step widens the political opening a bit further. The United States could match improvements in human rights performance with a commensurate reduction of its criticism of Cuba in international fora and some easing of coercive economic measures, such as pressure on third countries. It could agree to suspend TV Marti (whose effectiveness is questionable anyway) and lift certain elements of embargo (particularly those dealing with communication that actually help Castro by keeping information out of Cuba) in exchange for a loosening of censorship in Cuba. It could agree to accept Cuba's return to the OAS once freedom of association is allowed and organizations such as political parties, labor unions and professional associations are allowed to form. It could make a commitment that once elections are held and certified as free and fair by OAS monitors, it would move quickly to normalize relations with whatever government won and would lift the embargo completely. Other offers, including granting access to the GSP and CBI programs, support in international financial institutions, and even economic and technical assistance program could be included as sweeteners.

During the dialogue, no unilateral actions would be necessary, although certain steps that provide Castro little benefit and conform to the overall objective of creating an opening, such as relaxing rules on family visits, could be taken as demonstrations of good faith. Significant U.S. actions would only take place in conjunction with concrete actions on Cuba's part. So long as human rights violations continue in Cuba, the United States would continue to denounce them. In general, it gives up nothing unless it gets something in return, and each step Cuba takes cracks the door open a bit further.

The United States should not insist on Cuba adopting a free-market economy at this point. This would only cloud the real issue of a democratic opening. There would be no reason to refrain from making its views clear on this subject, however.

3. The United States should take an active role in encouraging the development of democratic institutions in Cuba. This can be done by greatly expanding people-to-people contact outside the control of the Cuban government between Cubans and citizens of other nations. It should encourage political parties, labor unions, religious organizations, civic groups, professional organizations, academic communities and others in the United States, Latin America and Europe to visit Cuba and to sponsor Cubans on visits to their countries. It should urge international organizations (e.g., political bodies such as the Socialist International and the Christian Democratic Union and labor bodies such as Inter-American Regional Workers Organization and the Confederation of Latin American Workers) to play an energetic role in raising the consciousness of the Cuban people and, to the extent they are allowed, foster the growth of affiliates in Cuba. Despite Castor's repeated crackdowns, there are indications that there are many Cubans anxious to participate in democratic organizations.

4. The United States should encourage a process of national reconciliation in Cuba. This would entail engaging the Cuban-American community in looking clearly at what positive role it could play. It should encourage a direct dialogue involving the Castro government, the internal democratic forces, and the exile community. Some leaders of the nascent internal opposition have proposed such talks, but both the Castro government and the main actors in the Cuban American community have rejected it. The United States should seek to convince both parties that only through a political accommodation among all Cuba's sectors can enduring peace be achieved. The contribution the Cuban-American community could make in terms of entrepreneur ability and capital would be of enormous value in effecting Cuba's economic recovery.

As with any strategy, success depends largely on the actions of the other actors. It can be argued, and with considerable justification, that Castro would never accept any form of political opening; throughout his life he has firmly rejected any move that would weaken his power. It is very possible that he would reject this approach.

Even if Castro is intransigent, following this strategy could still have sizeable benefits. It would deliver an important message to those in the military, the government and the party, the only ones capable of toppling Castro, that the United States is not their enemy. This could calm their fear of change and reassure them that if Castro were removed, the United States would be prepared to deal with them constructively. It would also enhance our standing with our friends in Latin America by showing them our reasonableness and flexibility. If Castro walks away from an historic opportunity to reach an accommodation with the United States, he will truly be isolated.

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